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6.—EXETER

Portfolio OF English Cathedrals



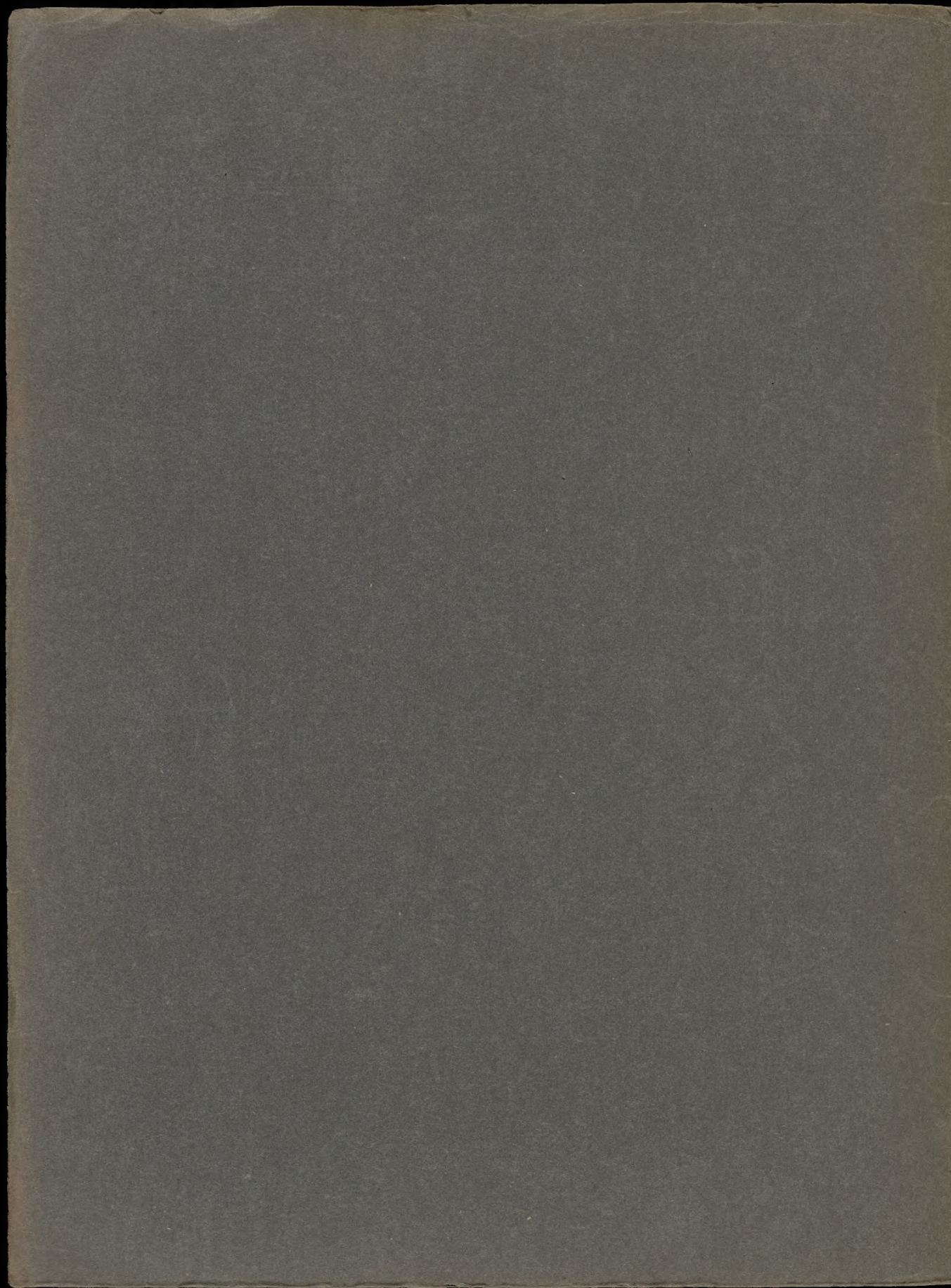
With Historical and
Architectural Notes
By ARNOLD FAIRBAIRNS



EXETER

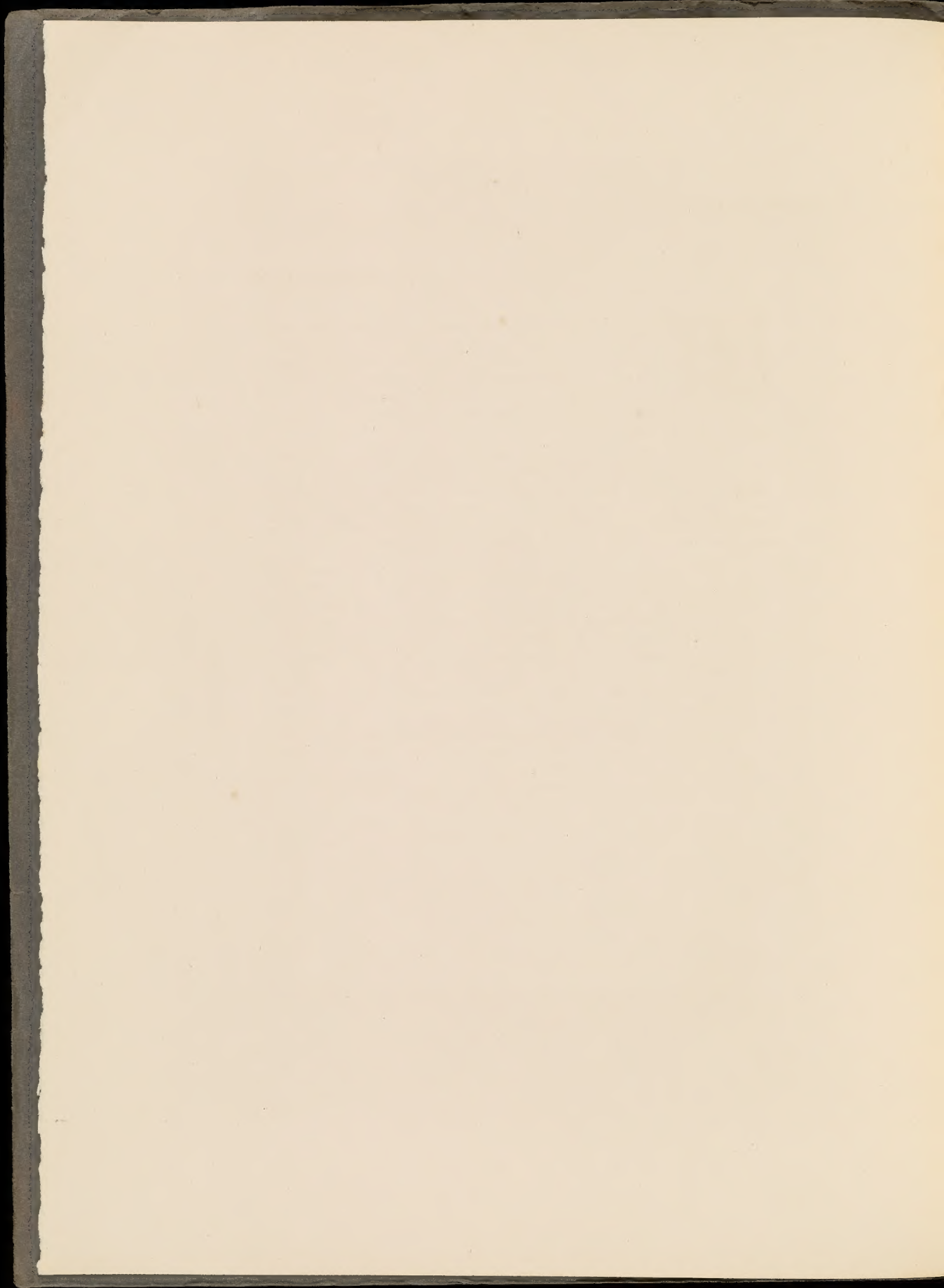
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EXETER CATHEDRAL



INTRODUCTION



BISHOP LIVING, the friend and counsellor of Canute, united the two sees of Devon and Cornwall at Crediton, about 1043. Seven years later the fear of Danish raiders induced Leofric to seek shelter in Exeter, where he found a suitable church in Athelstan's monastery of St. Mary and St. Peter. Canons were substituted for the Benedictine monks, who were transferred to Edward the Confessor's new foundation at Westminster.

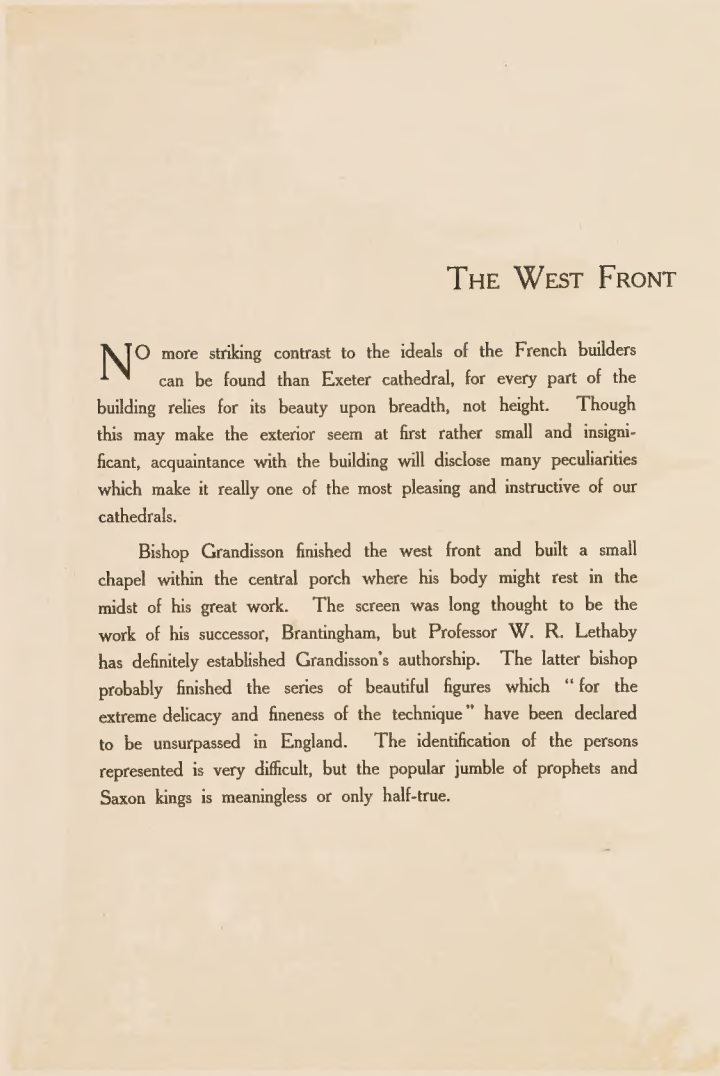
The Norman Conquest brought little change to Exeter, and it was not till the time of William de Warelwast (1107—28) that the Saxon church was replaced by a cathedral in the Norman style. This building stood till the end of the thirteenth century, when there was wrought a wonderful transformation: Peter Quivil (1280—91), a native of Exeter, began rebuilding the cathedral in the Decorated style, and within seventy years the church was finished in accordance with his original design.

With a revenue of £100,000 a year the bishops were able to do more than rebuild their cathedral. Walter de Stapledon began the connexion of the see with Oxford by founding Stapledon Inn and Hart Hall. He was made Lord High Treasurer in 1320, but incurring the hatred of the people on account of his support of Edward II. was murdered in Cheapside in 1326. Pope John XXII. in the following year appointed as bishop his chaplain, John Grandisson, under whose rule Exeter reached the zenith of its power. So great was Grandisson's influence at Rome that he successfully withstood the claim of Archbishop Meopham to visit his cathedral, a triumph which, it is said, broke the Primate's heart.

Later benefactions by Edmund Stafford and Hugh Oldham bind Exeter to the University of Oxford. The former enlarged Stapledon's Hall and gave it its new name of Exeter College. The latter assisted his friend Richard Fox in the founding of Corpus Christi College, persuading him to abandon the monastic establishment he contemplated in view of the changes that were already threatening the old order.

Miles Coverdale, Tyndale's fellow worker in translating the Bible, was consecrated bishop in 1551, but within two years was deprived by Mary. During the Commonwealth the cloisters were destroyed, and a brick wall built in the cathedral so as to provide churches for both Presbyterians and Independents. Of the Restoration bishops, John Gauden is best known as the reputed author of the mysterious "Icon Basilike"; Seth Ward, as he did later at Salisbury, restored the church at immense cost to a more seemly state, driving back to their proper place the traders who had invaded the cathedral precincts; while John Trelawny's name has been immortalized in the Cornish ballad composed during the imprisonment of the Seven Bishops.

With the industrial revolution the wealth and importance of the West have gradually declined, and the re-creation of the Cornish diocese in 1877 has reduced the see of Exeter to its tenth century jurisdiction.

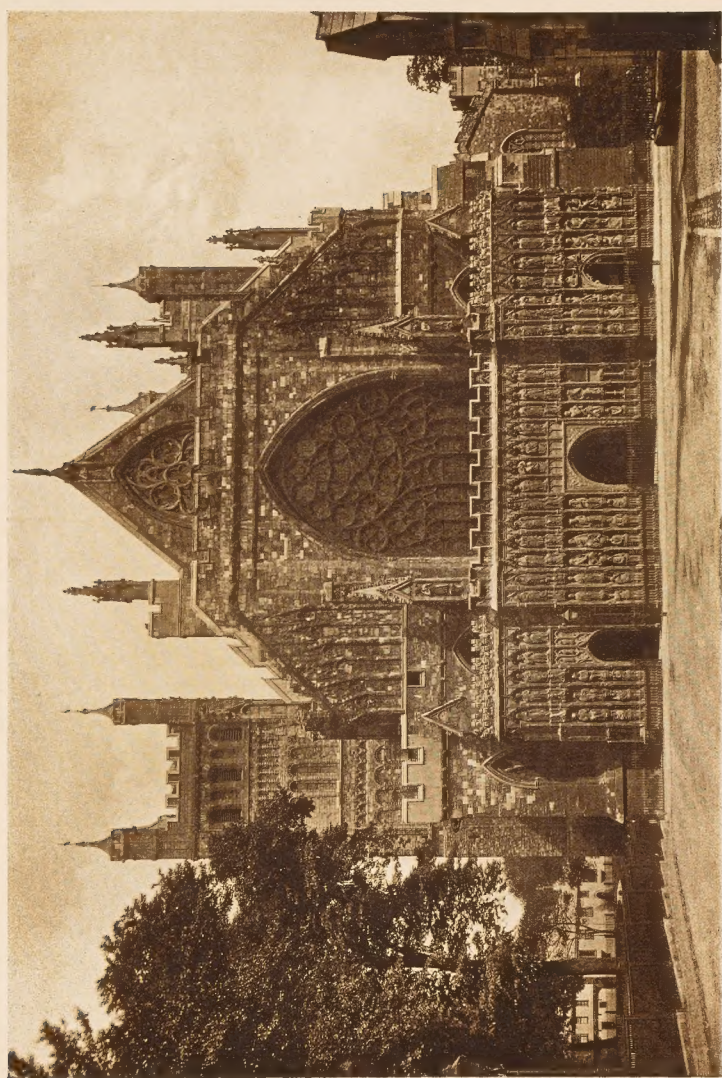


THE WEST FRONT

NO more striking contrast to the ideals of the French builders can be found than Exeter cathedral, for every part of the building relies for its beauty upon breadth, not height. Though this may make the exterior seem at first rather small and insignificant, acquaintance with the building will disclose many peculiarities which make it really one of the most pleasing and instructive of our cathedrals.

Bishop Grandisson finished the west front and built a small chapel within the central porch where his body might rest in the midst of his great work. The screen was long thought to be the work of his successor, Brantingham, but Professor W. R. Lethaby has definitely established Grandisson's authorship. The latter bishop probably finished the series of beautiful figures which "for the extreme delicacy and fineness of the technique" have been declared to be unsurpassed in England. The identification of the persons represented is very difficult, but the popular jumble of prophets and Saxon kings is meaningless or only half-true.

EXETER CATHEDRAL



THE WEST FRONT

THE NAVE

THOUGH only the eastern bay of the nave was built by Quivil the whole may be attributed to his genius, for Grandisson adhered very closely to his model. A period of seventy years elapsed between Quivil's inception and Grandisson's completion of the work, but the variations in the latest parts are remarkably small. The view eastward, with the unbroken vault stretching over nave, crossing, and choir, presents one of the richest and most pleasing interiors in England. Grandisson's boast to the Pope was indeed not unfounded when he said it would "surpass every Gothic church in England or France."

The carving of the corbels and bosses throughout is of extreme delicacy, fine specimens of the finest period of Gothic sculpture. One boss bears a representation of the martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury, an interesting survival: for Henry VIII. ordered the destruction of all pictorial or other record of the archbishop.

Grandisson incorporated the chapel of St. Edmund, which had probably been added to the Norman nave by Bishop Marshall, and built a north porch of exceptional beauty.

EXETER CATHEDRAL



THE NAVE

THE MINSTRELS' GALLERY

POPULAR tradition, ever ready to associate the names of great persons with beautiful works of art, has asserted that this gallery was first used on the return of the Black Prince from France with his royal prisoner in 1357. As Canterbury has a strong counter-claim to his presence on that memorable journey to London, the story is open to doubt. But whether it be true or not, the interest and beauty of this famous gallery are little affected. The angel minstrels are performing on instruments of quaint, primitive construction which have been identified, from the left, as a cittern, bagpipes, flageolet, violin, harp, trumpet, organ, guitar, tambour, and cymbals; the sixth and tenth being uncertain.

The galleries are quite a feature of Exeter, for Quivil built most graceful examples high up in the Norman towers when he opened them into the church. In the north transept is the ancient clock which certainly existed as early as 1376. According to the theory of that period the earth is made the centre round which sun and moon revolve.

FROM THE SOUTH-EAST

MUCH learning and time have been devoted to the solution of the problem concerning the position of the towers in the Norman church. It seems practically certain that they were as now transeptal towers: as such they are almost unique in Europe, the neighbouring church of Ottery St. Mary being the only other example in England. As their construction shows they were probably intended to serve the double purpose of church and castle, a very common practice in early times. The south tower, pictured on the cover, has suffered least change, the turrets and battlements being Tudor additions and the window Peter Quivil's. The upper part of the north tower was rebuilt to take the great "Peter" bell which Bishop Courtenay brought from Llandaff.

Other notable features of the exterior are the multitude of buttresses necessitated by the heavy stone vaults, the great number and breadth of the windows, and the delicate fleur-de-lys cresting which relieves the monotony of the long stretch of roof.

The fall in the level of the ground towards the east gives the Lady Chapel a most happy elevation.

EXETER CATHEDRAL



THE MINSTRELS' GALLERY



FROM THE SOUTH-EAST

THE CHOIR

WHEN Bishop Quivil died he had rebuilt the Lady Chapel, converted the Norman towers into transepts, and built one bay of the nave. His successor Bishop Bitton (1292—1327) joined up these works by rebuilding the Norman choir and sanctuary on the model of Quivil's work. A variety of material was used, Purbeck marble, yellow sandstone, and white Cæn stone, the result being a beautiful blending of colour. Bishop Stapledon divided the choir from the nave by a rich screen, which Sir Gilbert Scott spared in his restoration, despite the eagerness of the authorities for its destruction. The east window, which retains much of the original glass, was inserted by Bishop Brantingham (1370—94). John Loosemoore built the organ in 1665, but later alterations have left little of his work except the case.

On either side of the choir are the chapels of St. Andrew and St. James, which Bishop Bronscombe, it is thought, built as transepts to the Norman choir. In the upper storey of St. Andrew's are preserved many valuable books, including the Exeter "Domesday" and Leofric's book of Saxon verse.

EXETER CATHEDRAL



THE CHOIR

THE SEDILIA

BISHOP STAPLEDON (1308—27) found the choir almost finished, but without any of the necessary fittings. He accordingly set about furnishing the new work worthily, and has left, in so doing, a magnificent memorial of the genius of his time. The Sedilia, for the use of the priests celebrating at the altar, are among the finest productions of the fourteenth century. Nature has never been more faithfully reproduced than in the exquisite foliage with which the canopies are enriched. It is interesting to compare the slender spires with the almost contemporary Despencer tomb at Tewkesbury.

The magnificent bishop's throne has now been definitely assigned to the same bishop, though it was long thought to be the work of Bishop Bothe, nearly a hundred and fifty years later. It is over 57 feet high, and constructed without a single nail. During the Rebellion the whole structure was taken to pieces and hidden, to preserve it from the fate which befell so much wood-work at that period. It was skilfully restored by Sir Gilbert Scott, but no attempt was made to replace the figures in the empty niches.

EXETER CATHEDRAL



THE SEDILIA

THE LADY CHAPEL, EAST

THE closing years of the twelfth century saw great changes at the east end of the cathedral ; for Bishop Marshal pulled down the Norman apse and added a sanctuary of five bays, besides a Lady Chapel with smaller chapels on either side. It was not long, however, before further alterations were made, for Bishop Bronscombe (1257—80) began by transforming the two small chapels, and was at work on the Lady Chapel when he died. Quivil finished the latter, and indeed the whole work may be considered as his, for the earlier parts are very hard to distinguish.

The tombs in the chapel are of great interest. In the floor a simple marble slab marks the grave of Bishop Quivil, the great designer of the present cathedral. His epitaph,—“*Petra tegit Petrum, nihil officiat sibi tetrum,*”—rivals in its brevity the better known memorial of Sir Christopher Wren. On the south side are the early tombs of Bishops Bartholomew Iscanus (1184) and Simon of Apulia (1223). On the north, “the sleepy Judge,” Sir John Doderidge and his wife are commemorated by fine Jacobean figures.

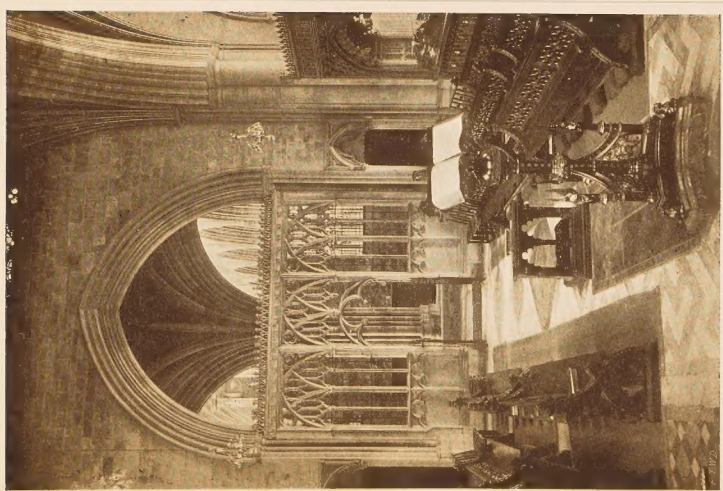
Grandisson built a delicately carved reredos, of which only the central canopy remains ; the rest is modern.

THE LADY CHAPEL, WEST

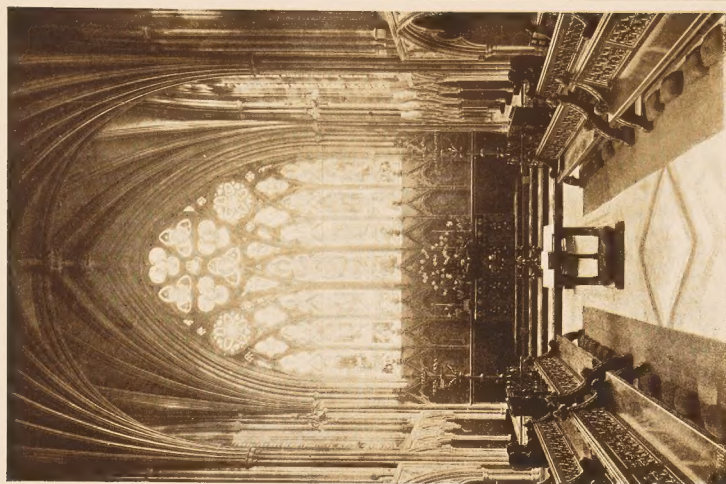
TWO arches, possibly the work of Bishop Bronscombe, open at the west end into the chapels of St. Gabriel and St. Mary Magdalen. They enclose rich Perpendicular canopies, built when Bishop Stafford, whose tomb is shown here, was buried in 1419. Under the south arch is the remarkable effigy of Bishop Bronscombe, one of the finest ecclesiastical figures in existence. The whole was once gorgeously coloured, and considerable traces of the colouring remain.

A fine series of late Perpendicular screens enclosing all the chapels was built by Bishop Oldham, the founder of Manchester Grammar School. His chantry stands at the south end of the retro-choir opposite the Speke chantry. The owls which decorate the bishop's chapel form part of his rebus,—Owl-dom,—the second syllable being carved on a label held in the bird's beak.

EXETER CATHEDRAL



THE LADY CHAPEL, WEST



THE LADY CHAPEL, EAST



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